

123

COMMEMORATIVE
DISCOURSE.



A
DISCOURSE,

DELIVERED

SABBATH MORNING, SEPTEMBER 3, 1865,

ON OCCASION OF THE

FIFTIETH ANNIVERSARY OF THE DEDICATION

OF THE

SECOND PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH,

ALBANY.

BY WILLIAM B. SPRAGUE, D. D.,

ALBANY :

VAN BENTHUYSEN'S STEAM PRINTING HOUSE.

1865.



Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2018 with funding from

This project is made possible by a grant from the Institute of Museum and Library Services as administered by the Pennsylvania Department of Education through the Office of Commonwealth Libraries

COMMEMORATIVE DISCOURSE.

JOHN IV, 37.

ONE SOWETH AND ANOTHER REAPETH.

It is a law of the Divine administration that whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap; that is, that the consequences of every one's conduct shall, sooner or later, for good or evil, be visited upon himself. But this is quite consistent with another feature of the Divine economy,—namely, that each individual exerts an influence that reaches much *beyond* himself;—an influence that sometimes comprehends a wide range, and always survives the mortal life from which it proceeds. Hence a single beneficent effort, put forth by an individual, may act with a mighty regenerating power upon the character and destiny of many generations. And this remark applies to men in their social as well as individual capacity, including also the concurring agencies of Divine Providence—in other words, the future is the legitimate growth of the present—each successive period takes its complexion, in a greater or less degree, from that which has

immediately preceded it; and, even though a revolution may have intervened, to change the whole face of society, a diligent search will reveal the fact that the elements of that revolution were embodied in the character or the doings of the generation that has just passed away. Thus is continually illustrated the truth that "one soweth and another reapeth."

My design, in this discourse, is to show you that this great principle of the Divine government has already been strikingly illustrated in the history of this congregation; that the germ of the signal prosperity which it has hitherto enjoyed is to be distinctly traced in its original organization. We will contemplate the *sources* in which the formative influence has originated, and the *results* which have been accomplished by it.

In speaking of the high degree of prosperity which this congregation has enjoyed, I shall of course be obliged to refer to certain praiseworthy and honourable characteristics, with which its prosperity has been identified. But, in doing this, I trust I shall not minister to a self-righteous or self-complacent spirit; for, notwithstanding all the good that has been exhibited and accom-

plished here, we are constrained to acknowledge that we have fallen far short of the full measure of Christian activity and usefulness of which we were capable. You will bear in mind, then, that, while the occasion will lead me to dwell on the brighter features of our history as a ground of thankful acknowledgment, there are nevertheless good reasons why our gratitude should be qualified by humility.

What then were the *circumstances*, in connection with the organization of this church, to which its subsequent prosperity is to be chiefly referred?

I remark, in the first place, that there was much in the *period* when it was established, that was favourable to a free and healthful development.

Its establishment was nearly contemporaneous with that revival of the *missionary spirit*, which has marked so bright an epoch in the history of the universal Church. After the first glorious impulse communicated to the Church by the Reformation had subsided, there was a long period in which the energies of Protestant Christianity seemed in a measure paralyzed, and her progress was at best of a slow and doubtful character.

The terrible persecution that drove the Pilgrim Fathers to seek a home in this distant wilderness, was the providential instrumentality for inaugurating an era, not only of purer faith and brighter light, but of a deeper sense of obligation to carry the Gospel to those who were destitute of it. Accordingly, we find that JOHN ELIOT, at an early period of his ministry in this country, became deeply interested in behalf of the savage tribes around him, and not only acquired their language with a view to act as a missionary among them, but actually translated the Bible into their own vernacular, as the most effectual means of carrying forward the work of evangelization. And to him succeeded the MAYHEWS; and then came the BRAINERDS, and other kindred spirits, who laboured with great zeal in endeavouring to bring the Gospel in contact with the savage mind and heart. But this missionary spirit, even in respect to our own North American Indians, gradually died away, and then came a somewhat protracted period, in which the Church at large, with the single exception of the United Brethren, seemed to have well nigh forgotten her mission to evangelize the world. The first waking up to a sense of neglected obligation

was on the other side of the ocean, in the formation of the London Missionary Society, in 1795; and that, after a few years, was followed by the British and Foreign Bible Society; and these two great institutions may be said to have marked the distinct ushering in of the missionary age. And the flame, thus kindled in Great Britain, quickly darted across the Atlantic; and after several Missionary Societies, designed to act upon the religious interests of our own country, had been in operation a few years, sprang up that noble and now venerable institution—the American Board of Foreign Missions. Six years later, in 1816, was formed the American Bible Society,—a most efficient coadjutor with the preceding; and the two, sustained and encouraged by numerous auxiliaries, have ever since been prosecuting their mission of light and love through the world. So you perceive this church was organized just at the time when the American Church was recognizing afresh her obligations to her Head, and recording her pledge that she would not pause in the great work of evangelical missions until the Gospel should be preached to every creature.

Another striking characteristic of the period

referred to was, that *revivals of religion*, which had been, to a great extent, unknown, during the latter half of the last century, had then re-appeared, and many churches were rejoicing in the plentiful effusions of the Holy Ghost. Some time before the middle of that century, the great Edwards stood forth, the earnest friend of revivals, amidst a plentiful outpouring of the Spirit on his own congregation; and he did more than any man of his age, or perhaps any age, to discriminate between a true and false experience. A few years later, Whitefield, under the influence of a baptism of fire, traversed the country in various directions, and produced effects by his preaching scarcely less wonderful than the scenes which marked the day of Pentecost. This state of things continued, in greater or less intensity, during a period of several years; and there is no doubt that it brought salvation to multitudes, and ministered greatly to the spirituality and efficiency of the Church; while yet we are constrained to acknowledge that its good effects were partially neutralized by an admixture of human weakness and passion. After this season of general revival had passed away, the country soon became the theatre of deep political excite-

ment, which issued in the war that gave us our Independence; and, during this whole period, there was an all-pervading influence at work, utterly hostile to every thing like religious thought or feeling. About the commencement of the present century, the dreams of a self-righteous formalism in many of our churches began to be disturbed; and sometimes the still small voice, and sometimes the mighty rushing wind, wrought wonders, in the awakening and conversion of sinners. These revivals were generally distinguished at once for order and purity; while they were conducted with scriptural simplicity, and told with mighty effect upon the moral power of the churches which were the subjects of them. The year 1815,—the very year in which this church was gathered, was memorable for its number of powerful revivals; and copious showers of Divine influence fell upon several of our Colleges, particularly Yale and Princeton. It was a good time to found a church, when God's Spirit was moving so extensively and so powerfully, and such large numbers were seen pressing in at the strait gate.

Yet another circumstance worthy of notice in

this connection, is, that this church began its existence in a time of *peace*, though it was immediately preceded by a three years' war. When the plan for establishing the church was projected, and during nearly the whole time of the building of this edifice, our nation was engaged in a bloody strife with the nation from which we sprang—of course there was the usual suspense, agitation, turmoil, attendant on war; and it must have required an heroic strength of purpose to carry forward such an enterprise amidst so many influences fitted to embarrass and retard. And then, again, we who are just emerging from a war now, can easily understand that the expense incurred by the erection of this house, must have been greatly increased by the pressure of the times; and while the readiness thus to make pecuniary sacrifices indicated a high tone of public spirit, the actual making of those sacrifices must have served greatly to quicken and elevate the same noble principle. But this house, though built in troublous times, was not dedicated till after the storm was over. There was much in the happy termination of the war, as well as in the successful completion of the edifice, to call forth, from those who origi-

nally constituted the congregation, devout thanksgivings to God ; and, through their grateful thoughts of the Divine beneficence, an impulse in favour of truth and goodness would naturally be communicated to them. At the time of the organization of the church, and for many years after, there was peace in all our borders ; and with it all those influences which peace generates, in aid not only of self-culture, but of every purpose and effort for the improvement of the race.

But if this enterprise owes its success partly to the period when it was undertaken, not less is it indebted to the character of the *men* who originated it. It is the dictate of nature that the agency by which any work is accomplished should give complexion to that work ; and though, in this ever-changing world, we know that what appear the most wisely concerted plans are liable to fail, yet where we see intelligence, and integrity, and energy united to sustain a project, it is reasonable to anticipate a favourable issue. I know not who the individual was to whose mind the idea of establishing this church first occurred ; but I know that the men who were early engaged in the enterprise, were men in whose

footsteps you would expect success to follow. They were in the prime of their activity and usefulness. They were endowed with a large share of public spirit; were resolute to encounter difficulties, and thoughtful of the interests of the future. Most of them were prosperously engaged in business, and some of them had already grown rich, and all were ready to contribute in aid of the object, according to their several ability. The original members of the church are believed to have been generally earnest and devoted Christians; and there were some among them who have not ceased to bear their consistent and loving testimony for Christ to this day. What else could we expect than that a church, formed by such an agency, and under such auspices, should, by the blessing of God, attain to an honourable rank among its sister churches, and show itself, in some good degree, a light in the world?

I recognize another element of prosperity in the *spirit* in which this organization was produced. Nothing is more common than for a church to be born in a quarrel; to be the child of misapprehension, perhaps of misrepresentation, and even bitter conflict; though we know that a

sovereign and gracious God often overrules these revolting scenes for advancing his cause, and thus promoting his glory. But, thanks to our God, such was not the origin of this church—on the contrary, there is nothing pertaining to its origin, which either history or tradition has preserved, that we could even wish had been otherwise. The good old mother church,—the only Presbyterian church then in this city, had, not only from its natural growth, but from the extraordinary eloquence of several of its Pastors, increased in such measure as to render colonization in the highest degree desirable, if not absolutely necessary; and this was the exigency which the formation of our own church was designed to meet—those who engaged in it saw that the interests of Presbyterianism, the interests of the common Christianity, in this city, demanded another organization; and hence the vigour and alacrity with which they entered upon their work. Doubtless their brethren with whom they had been—some of them for a long time—associated, felt deeply the sundering of the tie by which they had been bound together; but there was nothing like remonstrance or even complaint; and the fact that the Pastor of the First Church preached

the Dedication Sermon, taken in connection with the character of the sermon,—the manuscript of which is in my possession,—proves conclusively that, however he may have felt the loss of so many worthy members, yet his judgment and his heart both went along with the new organization. I never heard that there was so much as a murmur on the part of the old church, or any member of it, in view of the separation.

I will only add that the *ministry*, under which this church began its career, seemed auspicious of the best results. The man whom they chose for their Pastor had had several years' experience in the work, and, as his field of labour had been almost in this immediate neighbourhood, there was no lack of opportunities for finding out the measure of his adaptation to the place to which he was called. With talents of a highly popular cast he united warm and generous sensibilities, an unusually attractive manner, a wide acquaintance with the world, and a most graceful facility for social intercourse. His naturally benevolent spirit, quickened and directed by high religious principle, made him watchful for opportunities of soothing sorrow and relieving want; as an evidence of which I may state that,

in the early part of my ministry, I often heard, in the dwellings of the poor, the warmest testimonies to his kind offices towards them; and sometimes they told me, with a charming honest simplicity, that they could never love another minister so well. With advancing years his influence constantly became wider and deeper; and one of the highest honours within the gift of the Presbyterian Church was conferred upon him, in his being chosen Moderator of the General Assembly. It would be strange if such a mind and such a heart as he possessed, had not left an indelible impress upon a congregation of which he had the charge for more than thirteen years.

What I have said may suffice to indicate to you the sources of the influence by which the character and position of this church have been determined. Let us now trace the actual *results* of this influence, as already developed—in other words, let us glance at our past history, and pause a little at each of the more prominent points of our prosperity.

I may say, in the first place, that this congregation has generally been distinguished for *harmony* of feeling and action. How great a blessing this is we may best learn by looking at the con-

dition of those churches which have been rent asunder by party strife; whose members have seemed to ignore the law of love, and, though professedly the followers of the meek and benevolent Saviour, have abandoned themselves to mutual crimination and bitter hostility. From the evils incident to such a spirit our own church has been mercifully preserved; the only controversy of any kind, that has existed among us, having been in connection with the formation of the Fourth Church; and that has long since given place to the most unqualified mutual good will. I do not say that there have been no instances of private alienation among individual members; and I am well aware that in this, as in almost every other city church, there is far less of intercourse among the members than would best subserve their religious interests; and yet, I repeat, the general character of the church has always been peaceful. It has been especially characteristic of its *officers*,—certainly of those with whom I have been associated,—that they have studied the things that make for peace; and herein they have been an example to the flock, of which they have shared with me the oversight.

Another feature in the history of our congregation, to which we have a right to recur with pleasure and gratitude, is, that there has been here a remarkable *freedom from all tendencies to ultraism and extravagance*. You all know that the period during which this church has existed has been one of intense excitement; of bold and often erratic speculation; of zeal outstripping knowledge, and setting prudence and even decency at defiance. Scarcely any good cause but has suffered from the indiscretion and rashness of some of its friends; and, as a natural consequence, many who were predisposed to regard it with favour, have been thrown into the ranks of indifference, if not of positive hostility. Perhaps there is no subject in respect to which this tendency has been more strikingly or more sadly developed than *revivals of religion*. About the year 1825, there arose a set of men,—good men and true no doubt,—who were impatient to witness grander results from the effusions of God's Spirit; and, with a view to this, they instituted a system of measures, which, to say the least, brought much of disorder in their train; and the consequence was that many who

had been the earnest friends of revivals became faint-hearted and doubtful; and the cause, so long blest of God and dear to the Church, seemed to pass into dire eclipse; though, thanks to our gracious Lord, the evil to which I refer lasted but a few years. Such, I say, were the tendencies in respect to almost every department of moral and religious action. Nor is the fact difficult to be accounted for—for the Church had but just before been aroused from her long and ignoble slumber; and, in deprecating the position from which she had emerged, she fell, by a natural process incident to human imperfection, into the opposite extreme. If this spirit still lingers, it has certainly experienced a decisive check; and meanwhile it is comforting to reflect that God moves in a mysterious way for the accomplishment of his purposes, and “from seeming evil still educes good.”

Now I think I may say, with full confidence, that this congregation has been signally preserved from sympathy with extreme measures on the one hand, and from that apathy which such measures are likely to generate on the other. For instance, you have never justified or asked for the slightest infringement of the order that

becometh God's House, while yet you have gratefully welcomed the presence of the Holy Spirit here, and been ready to co-operate with Him in his gracious work. And thus it has been in reference to other objects of personal and public interest—you have carefully distinguished between the objects and their abuses; and while you have withheld your assent from the latter, you have rendered a prompt and cheerful aid to the former. I do not mean that either you or I have done, or perhaps even fully comprehended, our duty on this subject, in all its bearings; but I do believe that the general position assumed by this congregation,—silently indeed, but still practically, and firmly, has been at once reasonable and scriptural; and not a small number of the churches which went in an opposite direction, have already rendered the strongest testimony in favour of the views to which you have so perseveringly adhered, by having practically returned to them.

I may say, also, that this congregation has been distinguished for a spirit of *liberality and Christian enterprise*. I have no means of even approximating to an accurate estimate of the amount of your public contributions, even since

I became connected with the church ; but I do know that there has been a collection taken up here regularly every month, in aid of some one of the great objects of public charity ; and these collections have generally been such as not to dishonour either the objects for which, or the congregation by which they were bestowed. In addition to this, there are many honoured individuals among us whose hearts are as open as Heaven to the thousand claims which are made upon them in private ; and not only many a child of want has been rendered comfortable, but many a great institution has been strengthened and enlarged, and many a benevolent project sustained and carried forward, by their generous benefactions. And while so much has been done in aid of the interests of religion and humanity without, I think I may say there has been a corresponding liberality and energy manifested in sustaining religious institutions among ourselves. I may mention particularly the Sabbath School, which has always been one of the prime instruments, as well as evidences, of our prosperity ; and though this has put in requisition Christian intelligence, and perseverance, and fidelity, rather than money, yet, considering the manner in

which the school has been conducted, and the agencies by which it has been sustained, and I may add, the benign results which it has wrought out, I cannot forbear to regard it as a signal monument at once of energy and liberality. And I must not forget, in this connection, to testify my high appreciation of the wisdom, and patience, and kindness, that have originated the *infant* school, and kept it going from year to year, thus bringing our dear little ones within the range of the best possible influence that can exist outside of the family, almost as soon as they have left the cradle. These and other instrumentalities for good, in connection with the church, which I might mention, may be taken as a faithful exponent of the spirit which I am venturing to claim for you.

It is a fact not unworthy of notice here, that the influence of this congregation has been felt in almost every part of the land through the emigration of many of its prominent members. Men and women, not a few, who have, for many years, been our fellow worshippers and our associates in doing good, have scattered, some into the Far West, and some into other parts of the country, where they have become centres of evangelical influence,

and, if they have not gone to their reward, are still building new monuments of their fidelity in the cause of Christ. It will not, I trust, be thought invidious that I should refer particularly to one of them—for with a most devout spirit and a ruling passion for doing good, he united the finest talents and accomplishments, and withal, rose to some of the highest stations of official dignity—need I say that I refer to the lamented BENJAMIN F. BUTLER. He became a member of this church in 1817, and continued his relation with it until 1833, when he removed to Washington, in consequence of having accepted the office of Attorney General of the United States. During this whole period, his life was eminently worthy of his profession, as a disciple of Christ—he never gave out a dubious light—though kept, by his professional engagements, in constant contact with the world, he showed himself superior to its ensnaring influences, and in communion with a power that was always drawing him towards Heaven. When he left us, we felt deeply the loss, though we knew that, wherever he might be, he would be a witness and a labourer for Christ. And thus it proved. At Washington, amidst all the oppressive cares of the Govern-

ment, and afterwards at New York, amidst the continued routine of labours incident to a wide legal practice, he never forgot what was required of him as a Christian—his presence in the Sunday School, and at the prayer-meeting and weekly lecture, and wherever there was an opportunity of doing or getting good, formed part of the testimony of his daily life to the all-pervading influence of his religion over him. He went away, as he supposed, to rest, and to recruit his exhausted energies, but, as it turned out, he went to die. And if we knew all, perhaps we should know that his good influence still lingers in that great dissolute city, where the destroyer met him; for who can tell but that some word spoken from his death-bed, amid the visions of heavenly glory, or even the smile that irradiated his countenance, when he was getting ready to ascend, may have impressed itself on some memory or lodged itself in some heart, and thus, through the Spirit's gracious influence, proved the good seed that is bringing forth fruit unto everlasting life.

I must not omit to mention, under this head, that this church, though only half a century old, is the mother of two flourishing and influential

churches in our city. The elder of these—the Fourth Church—originated in a difference of opinion on some matters that both parties considered of vital interest to the cause of experimental religion; but, whatever may have been the merits of the controversy, the church itself has, under a succession of able and faithful Pastors, grown into a large and efficient body, to whose good influence it would be difficult to fix a limit. The other church,—the State Street Presbyterian, though not professedly a colony from our own, drew from it so nearly all its original members, that we have a fair right to claim, as our friends composing it cheerfully yield to us, the honour of its paternity. That church originated, not, as too often happens, in dissatisfaction or disgust, but in a deep conviction that another Presbyterian organization was needed to meet the religious wants of the city; and we parted with those who went from us, with regret indeed, and yet with joy that they were disposed to engage in so praiseworthy an enterprise; and we thank God for all the success that has crowned their efforts, and for every thing that betokens rapid and healthful progress. May both these churches perform their mission

of love and blessing amidst manifold tokens of the Divine favour, each sending up its myriads to join the ransomed throng in the eternal temple.

Let me add—and this is the last particular to which I ask your attention—that this church has shared liberally in that richest of all blessings,—*the influence of God's gracious Spirit*. At several different periods religion has become the all-engrossing subject among us; the spirit of worldliness has subsided into a habit of solemn and earnest thought; fervent prayers, and tender addresses, and flowing tears,—all crowned with devout thanksgivings for the light and peace which the renovating act brings into the soul, have told most impressively of the presence of that Divine Agent, whose province it is to turn night into day, death into life. And, as the result of these special gracious visitations, large numbers have expressed their hope in Christ, and been added to the church. We have indeed to lament that there have been protracted seasons of spiritual lethargy among us, when religion has evidently been in the back ground, and the wise and the foolish virgins have seemed to slumber together; and yet it is a grateful circumstance

in our history to record, that, during the thirty-six years of my pastorate, there has been but a single Communion season at which none have been added to our number. There is enough to humble us in the fact that we have not been more diligent and earnest to secure the awakening, converting, sanctifying influences of God's Spirit. There is enough to call forth our warmest gratitude in the fact that, notwithstanding all our delinquencies, God has never ceased to be gracious unto us, and sometimes has poured upon us a shower of spiritual blessings.

And now, while we acknowledge God's ever present agency in all our prosperity as a congregation, can we forbear to recognize the connection between the present and the past—especially is not the fact too palpable to be ignored, that all the good that has been enjoyed here, in connection with the ordinances of religion, by almost two generations, has been only the natural flowing out of a fountain that was opened in the original establishment of the church? I say again, God's providence is to be acknowledged in the whole history—God ordained the time—God chose the men—God imparted the spirit—God determined the character of the ministra-

tions—and all in such a manner as to secure the blessed result in which we rejoice. And yet, while we render our first offering of gratitude to Him, shall we not embalm the memories of those whom He was pleased thus to constitute our benefactors? Is it too much to hope that we shall meet many of them in Heaven, to review with them those labours, the influence of which will be flowing onward and upward till the last of the ransomed shall be gathered in?

From the standpoint which we now occupy, it is impossible to avoid carrying our views forward to the future; and the inquiry that most naturally presses upon us is, what will be the character, the position, the influence of this church, in coming years? The answer, as suggested by the great principle on which this discourse is founded, is—it will be just what you and I, under God's controlling providence, are pleased to make it. As the original founders of the church were charged with the interests of those who should immediately succeed them, and as, by their wise, and energetic and faithful management, they have secured to us an unwonted measure of prosperity as a congregation, so are we put in trust, prospectively, with the interests of those who

shall come after us; and the influence which we now exert will pass onward and onward when we are no longer here to modify or counteract. What then shall we do in order to secure the best result?

I answer, what we have to do first, is to endeavour to elevate the tone of Christian feeling, and the standard of Christian character, among us; and, with a view to this, we, who profess to be the followers of Christ, must be more careful in the keeping of our own hearts; more resolute to resist the unhallowed influences of the world; more circumspect in the habits of our daily life; more watchful for opportunities of doing good; more diligent and faithful in our attendance on the means of grace, as well as in our efforts to bring others under their reclaiming and sanctifying power—in short, we must endeavour, in humble dependence on Divine grace, to do our whole duty,—to God, to our fellow creatures, and to ourselves; and, in pursuing such a course, we cannot fail to bring down God's blessing upon ourselves, and leave a rich heritage to those who come after us. It is not temporal but spiritual growth that constitutes the true prosperity of a church. It is quite pos-

sible that a church may have in it a large number of rich men, and men of learning and civil distinction, and may thereby exert a commanding influence of a certain kind through the whole community in which it is situated, and yet may have as little of the spirit of a living, active piety as had the Church of Laodicea, when the Saviour breathed forth upon it that memorable rebuke. And, on the other hand, it is quite a supposable case,—nay, a case that has often occurred,—that a church should be poor in worldly resources, but rich in faith and good works; that it should attract no attention from the world, while it draws down to it hosts of angels. Who will not say that such a church, however humble the position which it occupies in the sight of man, is, after all, a most honoured body,—as being in close alliance with the General Assembly and Church of the First Born?

But while the future prosperity of the congregation must depend chiefly on the amount of spiritual influence that pervades it, it is needful also that a careful attention should be given to its *temporal* interests; especially that there should be ample accommodations for our week-day religious services, as well as for the exercises of the

Sabbath School. We all know that, for several years past, the room that we have been accustomed to devote to these purposes, has been found far less commodious than we could desire; inso-much that you have already inaugurated a project for building another, larger, and more convenient edifice. Without presuming to dictate to you in respect to the time for carrying this most laudable purpose into effect, I may be allowed to ask whether it would not be a fitting and beautiful conjunction of events, that the fiftieth anniversary of the Dedication of our church should be honoured by the commencement of another building, that shall stand by its side and be devoted to a kindred purpose? Nay, would it not be a grateful tribute to the memory of our fathers, in whose wisdom, and public spirit, and devotion to the honour of Christ, this church originated, that, with the second half century from the time that this noble work of their hands was completed, another work should commence, designed to enlarge and accelerate that current of good influence, which originated in their efforts, and to which they gave the first direction?

There is one subject upon which I feel con-

strained here to speak, which, to my own mind at least, is clothed with so much of both delicacy and sadness, that nothing but a strong sense of duty would lead me to approach it—I refer to the question of the continuance of my own relation to you as a Pastor. You are of course aware that I have already passed the age at which most ministers, who are spared so long, either retire altogether from their official labours, or share them with some one in the vigour of early life. I deem it, therefore, as only an act of justice to you, that I should refer this matter entirely to your decision—that is, that it should be left to you to determine whether I shall continue to serve you, as God may spare my life and preserve my faculties, or another and a younger man shall succeed, either partially or wholly, to the duties I have been accustomed to perform. And I trust you will not think it unreasonable that I should ask for some definite expression of your wishes on this subject; for even a feeling of uncertainty in respect to it could not fail to exert upon me a depressing and embarrassing influence.

It is due to candour that I should state, in a word, what are not, and what are, the reasons

for my thus formally bringing this matter to your consideration. Let me say, then, it has not been from my having heard the slightest intimation that my services are less acceptable to you now than they have been in any previous part of my ministry—on the contrary, the evidences of your good-will towards me seem to have multiplied with the lapse of years. It has not been from a consciousness, on my part, of any diminution of my ability to labour; for, more than almost any of my early associates in the ministry, I have reason to bless God for continuing to me, in nearly every respect, the full vigour of middle life. And certainly it has not been from any waning attachment to the field of my labours, or any diminished interest in the well-being of my charge; for sure I am that my heart never went out more warmly in all that pertains to your interests, temporal and spiritual, than at this hour. And now I will tell you what the reasons are. I well know that there belongs to human nature, as one of its original principles, the desire of occasional change; that the gratification of this desire is sometimes not only reasonable but salutary; and that many a good cause has received a fresh impulse, and been carried

forward to higher degrees of enlargement and success, from the mere breaking up of the monotony of a long continued procedure. The ministry under which you now sit has been protracted through a period of thirty-six years; and it is a question for you to decide, whether the sound of another voice, and a somewhat different mode of presenting Divine truth from that to which you have so long been accustomed, might not mark an epoch of fresh activity and interest in your history as a congregation. Then, again, as the introduction of another Pastor cannot be *very* distant, you may think it best that it should take place now, when there are no disturbing influences to be encountered, thus preventing the inconveniences and perils often attendant on vacancy. And I cannot forbear to add that I have been influenced, in some degree, by my own observation of cases not a few, in which ministers in the decline of life have retained their places through the forbearance of their congregations, when the common verdict has been that it would have been better for them to retire. What I have to request of you is, that you will proceed, asking only the one question, in what

way the best interests of this congregation can be most effectually promoted ; and I pledge myself to a faithful co-operation with you in carrying out any purpose which your wisdom may suggest. Hereafter you will consider this whole matter as lodged in your own hands ; and it is, and shall continue to be, my earnest prayer that you may be guided to such decisions and such measures as shall be best fitted to promote the highest interests of this beloved church through all coming generations. I have now spoken out to you my whole heart on a subject upon which, if I had taken counsel of my feelings, I should not have opened my lips.

There is yet another subject, altogether personal in its bearings, to which you must allow me to advert—I mean the unusual length of the period through which my ministry has been protracted, in connection with the unbroken exercise of kindness, on your part, by which it has been attended. During the thirty-six years of my sojourn here, the First Presbyterian Church has had successively three ministers,—one of whom however, had a pastorate of about thirty years ; the third has had five, and the fourth seven ; and, in this age of change, this has hardly been

an unusual experience. During all this time, your kindness towards me has never faltered; and I can truly say that I should hardly know where to look for another minister, whose lot, through so many years, (and I might add to these the previous years of my ministry,) has been equally favoured with my own. And, as I can never expect a more fitting occasion for giving expression to my gratitude, I know you will indulge me with the privilege of bearing testimony, in this public manner, to your considerate regard for every thing in which my happiness has, in any way, been involved. I thank the Session of the church, not only for their cordial co-operation with me in sustaining and advancing the religious interests with which we have been jointly charged, but for all the expressions of personal good will which I have received from them. I thank the Trustees of the congregation for the generous provision they have made, at different periods and in different ways, for my temporal support and comfort. I thank the Superintendents and Teachers of the Sabbath School for all the energy and fidelity they have exhibited, in helping to carry out the great ends of my ministry by the religious training of the

young. I thank the young men, especially for that more earnest tone of feeling and action which they have recently exhibited, in which I allow myself to recognize a pledge of a yet more vigorous co-operation in coming years. I thank the various families composing the congregation for the cordial welcome with which I am always greeted, and for every opportunity they give me of ministering in any way to their benefit. From my inmost heart I thank you all for every good and friendly office that I have received at your hands. But there are many who used to be here, whose kindnesses have a record in my heart, but whom my voice cannot now reach, because it cannot penetrate to their lowly resting place. May blessings rest upon their memories, and may their graves open finally into Heaven.

It is to me a deeply affecting thought that, in the congregation assembled here to-day, there are so very few who mingled in that great crowd of worshippers, who are said to have been present when this house was dedicated fifty years ago. As the result of a somewhat extended inquiry, I cannot ascertain that there are more than six or seven of those who originally composed this

congregation now living; and of these only two are still with us—one of whom is the senior member of the Session, the other the venerable widow of a prominent member of the congregation. Of those whom I found here at the time of my settlement in 1829, I believe scarcely more than a dozen remain; though there are a few others whose connection with the congregation, as well as residence in the city, has ceased. Of the Session of the Church, as I found it on my accession to the Pastorship, years have elapsed since the last member was carried to his grave. Eight have been constituted Elders during my ministry, just one half of whom have passed on to their reward. Oh the overwhelming rapidity with which the current has been setting forward from the midst of us into the world invisible! And yet, through the sovereign goodness of God, you and I are spared—I to speak to you as an ambassador for Christ, you to hear the words of eternal life from my lips. And now, with the full knowledge that the final result of my ministry must soon be determined, I would fain throw my whole soul into an effort to help you forward in the Divine life, or to persuade you to become reconciled to God.

I would that every Christian here might be led to a fresh consecration of himself to Christ, and to a course of more vigorous effort for the salvation of the lost, and the propagation of the knowledge and influence of the Gospel. I would that every one who is conscious that his whole work for eternity is yet upon his hands, might hear and heed the voice of God, speaking to him through the solemnities of this hour, and charging him to lose no time in preparing for the scenes beyond the veil. I would that our beloved youth especially would resolutely turn their backs upon the tempter, and enter upon the truly Christian life, thereby securing to themselves the favour of God, and with it their own eternal safety, joy and triumph. I would that our Sabbath School might exhibit still greater zeal, and fidelity, and efficiency, and be constantly sending up new names to be registered in Heaven. Oh that on every interest of this congregation God's richest blessing may rest. And when other generations shall come hither to worship, and other lips shall here proclaim the messages of Heaven, may the Blessed Spirit, in richer and still richer effusions, accompany the ministrations, until this church, having fully accomplished its mission, shall be

merged in the great assembly of the ransomed and the glorified.

In the preceding train of remark, I have limited myself to a view of our own experience as a congregation, during the last fifty years; but I cannot close the discourse without asking you to contemplate, for a moment, the signal changes which the *world* has been undergoing within the same period. Science, philosophy, every department of learning, has been widening its domain, and gathering to itself fresh laurels. Commerce, which, half a century ago, was restricted, if not within narrow limits, yet to comparatively few countries, now calls the world its own, and urges its way in spite of the rudest barbarism. Those two great agents, steam and electricity, have brought the whole world almost into a common neighbourhood. Freedom has been making its gradual inroads upon despotism, until the haggard old monster has scarcely a quiet resting place; and need I say that, in a way which none of us could have anticipated, God's mysterious Providence has terminated the system of bondage among ourselves. Wars, terrible wars, have convulsed and desolated the world; and the most terrible of all is that, the recent termination of

which has filled our land with gladness and praise. Meanwhile, the Gospel has been doing its gracious and transforming work among the nations; the dominion of Paganism has been greatly contracted; and the sun does not shine upon a land of which Christianity is not already preparing to take possession. It is given to us now to see that, amidst the darkest scenes, God's hand has been moving to work out glorious results; that streams of richest blessing have flowed in rivers of blood.

And now from the eminence which we here occupy, can we avoid looking off into the second half century of the life of our congregation, and anticipating some of the great events of which the present aspects of Providence would seem to supply the pledge. The period referred to has doubtless revelations in store for the world of which the highest human forecast has not yet dreamed; and yet we have only to form our judgments, from analogy, in respect to the future, to feel assured that the order of things is henceforth to be, in a high degree, progressive. When the history of the next fifty years shall be written, no doubt it will contain the record of many a convulsion in society, of many an unrighteous

struggle for power, of many a dark cloud discharging lightning and tempest upon the Church,—which may seem, for a time, to portend unmitigated evil; but if the record is completed, it will show that this was only God's mysterious way of working for the renovation of the world. And then, no doubt, there will be new developments of the laws of nature, new principles brought to light, concerning which the world will wonder that they had remained hidden so long, from which the general spirit of improvement will receive a fresh impulse. And more than all, Christianity, even if her whole work of régenerating the world should not by that time be accomplished, will still have lifted her sceptre in every part of the empire of spiritual ignorance and death. Let our faith linger gratefully, joyfully, upon the glorious prospect. Few of us will be here to share in the gratulations and thanksgivings of the centennial jubilee; but God grant that there may be lodged not only in the memories but in the characters of our children and children's children, witnesses to our conscientious and earnest activity, in labouring for the cause which will then be approaching the grandeur of a universal triumph.

